

## Article

# The Decontamination of $^{137}\text{Cs}$ Contaminated Concrete Using Electrokinetic Phenomena and Ionic Salt Washes in Nuclear Energy Contexts

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Abstract: This work describes the first known use of electrokinetic treatments and ionic salt washes to remediate concrete contaminated with  $^{137}\text{Cs}$ . A series of experiments were performed on concrete samples, contaminated with  $\text{K}^+$  and  $^{137}\text{Cs}$ , using a bespoke migration cell and an applied electric field (60 V potential gradient and current limit of 35 mA). Additionally, two samples were treated with an ionic salt wash ( $\leq 400 \text{ mol m}^{-3}$  of  $\text{KCl}$ ) alongside the electrokinetic treatment. The results show that the combined treatment produces removal efficiencies three times higher ( $>60\%$ ) than the electrokinetic treatment alone and that the decontamination efficiency appears to be proportional to the initial degree of contamination. Furthermore, the decontamination efficiencies are equivalent to previous electrokinetic studies that utilised hazardous chemical enhancement agents demonstrating the potential of the technique for use on nuclear licensed site. The results highlight the relationship between the initial contamination concentration within the concrete and achievable removal efficiency of electrokinetic treatment and other treatments. This information would be useful when selecting the most appropriate decontamination techniques for particular contamination scenarios.



25<sup>th</sup> May 2017

Dear Dr Tay,

**RE: Revision submission to the Journal of Hazardous Materials – JHAZMAT-D-17-00053**

It is my pleasure to submit our revised manuscript "*The Remediation of <sup>137</sup>Cs Contaminated Concrete Using Electrokinetic Phenomena and Ionic Salt Washes in Nuclear Energy Contexts.*" for consideration as a research paper in the Journal of Hazardous Materials. We thank the editor and reviewers for considering our manuscript and hope the revisions make the manuscript suitable for publication in the Journal of Hazardous Materials.

The revised manuscript describes a novel technique in the decontamination of cementitious materials, incorporating electrokinetic phenomena and ionic salt washes. This approach fundamentally reduces the hazard of deploying the electrokinetic treatments operationally, by eliminating the need to use strong acids or bases, without impacting the effectiveness of the technique.

The radiological characteristics of <sup>137</sup>Cs make it highly hazardous to humans and its physicochemical properties render it difficult to remove from cementitious structures. The combination of these factors makes <sup>137</sup>Cs-contaminated concrete material one of the most significant hazards and management problems on legacy nuclear sites, particularly at facilities in the United Kingdom, United States, Russia, and Japan. As such, the manuscript will be of interest to readers of the Journal who are involved in the management of concrete structures contaminated with <sup>137</sup>Cs,

In accordance with the Journal Submission requirements, our manuscript has the following:

Total number of Words: 4,988

Total number of Tables: 3

Total number of Figures: 7

Thank you for taking the time for considering our manuscript, we look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Andrew Parker

University of Cumbria

25<sup>th</sup> May 2017

Dear Dr Tay,

**RE: Submission of revised paper HAZMAT-D-17-00053**

Thank you for your response and reviewer's comments on our manuscript and accept our apologies for the delay in replying and providing a revised manuscript, we hope that the revised version of the manuscript will still be considered for publication. We would like to thank the reviewers for taking the time to consider our paper and providing insightful comments.

The following are point-by-point responses to the individual comments raised by each reviewer, with amendments based on the comments highlighted in yellow in the revised manuscript:

Reviewer 1

***Comment 1 – 'For each method in the literature search was given only one or two references. They can be increase'***

The literature review contains the most relevant and recent papers on the specific topic of electrokinetic remediation of <sup>137</sup>Cs-contaminated concrete. As mentioned in our manuscript (Page 2, paragraph 3) the use of electrokinetic treatments in the remediation of <sup>137</sup>Cs-contaminated concrete has not been widely studied, hence there is not an abundance of literature to review to include in this section. We have highlighted the most pertinent aspects of literature methodology and provided the necessary references for readers to find further information on the individual methods should they wish to review these. Considering the reviewer's other comments, we have included an additional number of references to highlight the other areas where electrokinetic techniques have been adopted (Please see Reviewer 2 comment 2)

***Comment 2 – 'in the study concrete samples were artificially contaminated. causes of this should be explained as detail'***

We accept that our initial explanation of how the samples were artificially contaminated was insufficient. We have revised the appropriate section and included a more detailed description of the process, mentioning that cationic diffusion is the mechanism of contamination for the samples used in this work. This is in paragraph 2 of Section 3.1.

***Comment 3 – 'The concrete samples used throughout this work have been mixed with a 3:2:1 ratio. this situation should be explained'***

We take the point that we had not fully explained the preparation of the concrete samples. We have addressed this by expanding Section 3.1 paragraph 1 to say – '*The concrete samples used throughout this work were mixed with a 3:2:1 ratio (pebble aggregate, standard siliceous sand, and Ordinary Portland Cement) based on European Standard EN 196-1, with a water to cement mass ration of 0.5.*'

***Comment 4 – 'in the conclusion was stated that the results show that the decontamination efficiency was 19-21% for 137 Cs. do Authors have simillar to resuls. if yes, they sould give those. if not they sould said this.***

In the conclusion, we are reiterating the  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  decontamination efficiency results obtained in the experiments carried out for this paper, which are compared to other studies in the Section 4.3. Our results are first described on page 11 (Section 4.2) and presented in Table 3 (page 13) and we have compared our results, for all our experiments, to the relevant literature results in Section 4. We have also reiterated the relevant literature studies for comparison in the conclusion, as the reviewer suggests, by referring to Table 1 which presents the decontamination efficiencies of all the comparable studies in literature that are of similar experimental design.

#### Reviewer 2

##### ***Comment 1 – ‘Some where facts are missing in correlating the removal efficiency and initial contaminant’***

We have attempted to make it clearer what the initial levels of contamination were by modifying paragraph 3 on page 7. We have also included Table 2 outlining the degree of initial contamination for all the samples used in the experimental work, indicating both the calculated mass of contaminant adsorbed (in  $\text{mmol cm}^{-3}$ ) and the resulting radioactivity (in kBq). Table 3 also presents the initial contamination as well as the final removal efficiencies (in %) and the Decontamination Factor (DF). With regards to the initial contamination, we have included a fuller description of the methods used in response to Comment 2 from Reviewer 1.

##### ***Comment 2 – ‘Make the base of the strong with appropriate references’***

We recognised the reviewer’s comments that we had not provided enough references to explain the range of existing papers that describe the use of electrokinetic treatments. We have rectified this by adding >10 new references to contexts where electrokinetic techniques have been used to remediate a variety of materials. This section is included in paragraph 2 of page 2. As we have stated in the manuscript, the use of electrokinetic remediation techniques on concrete contaminated with  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  has not been widely studied and as such there is a limited number of relevant references from which we can refer to. We make note in the manuscript that this is the case (Page 2 paragraph 3) as well as highlighting that electrokinetic treatments are widely used elsewhere on a range of different materials and contaminants which includes the additional references. The small number of references with regard to the technique being used on concrete contaminated with  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  is a significant aspect in what makes this manuscript novel, see the following response.

##### ***Comment 3 – ‘What makes the manuscript novel’***

We have addressed this valid concern by re-checking the literature for an instance of electrokinetic treatments used in combination with ionic salt washes to remediate concrete contaminated with radioactive fission products. We have not been able to find such an instance, therefore we believe the manuscript describes highly novel work. As such we have included two statements reiterating this assessment, one in the abstract and one in the conclusion.

##### ***Comment 4 – ‘Improve the figure figure quality’***

Without knowing which Figures the reviewers are referring to specifically we have reviewed all the Figures in the manuscript to ensure they meet the Journal’s standards. As such, we have removed Figure 2 and revised Figure 7 to ensure it meets the quality of the other graphical figures (Fig 4, 5, & 6) and have reviewed the image quality of the photographic figures (Fig 1, 2, & 3) to ensure they meet the dpi requirements outlined in the Journal’s Guideline for Authors.

***Comment 5 – ‘Is it necessary to have a summary on page no 6’***

***Comment 6 – ‘Revise the introductory part.’***

Given that both comments 5 and 6 from Reviewer 2 relate largely to the Introduction of the manuscript, we will address both of them with a single response. Based on the discerning comments we have revised the introduction with the aim of being more specific in outlining the problem that the experimental work in this manuscript attempts to address. We believe the revised Introduction (Section 1) and Section 2.5 ‘Reducing the Hazard’ describe the background to the work and our aim in a clearer and more concise manner.

We again thank the Journal for considering our manuscript and the Reviewers for providing insightful comments. We hope that the revisions made to the manuscript make it suitable for publication in the Journal of Hazardous Materials. We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Dr Andrew Parker', with a stylized, cursive script.

Dr Andrew Parker

University of Cumbria

Final Word Count = 4988

## Abstract

This work describes the first known the use of electrokinetic treatments and ionic salt washes to remediate concrete contaminated with  $^{137}\text{Cs}$ . A series of experiments were performed on concrete samples, contaminated with  $\text{K}^+$  and  $^{137}\text{Cs}$ , using a bespoke migration cell and an applied electric field (60 V potential gradient and current limit of 35 mA). Additionally, two samples were treated with an ionic salt wash ( $\leq 400 \text{ mol m}^{-3}$  of KCl) alongside the electrokinetic treatment. The results show that the combined treatment produces removal efficiencies three times higher (>60%) than the electrokinetic treatment alone and that the decontamination efficiency appears to be proportional to the initial degree of contamination. Furthermore, the decontamination efficiencies are equivalent to previous electrokinetic studies that utilised hazardous chemical enhancement agents demonstrating the potential of the technique for use on nuclear licensed site. The results highlight the relationship between the initial contamination concentration within the concrete and achievable removal efficiency of electrokinetic treatment and other treatments. This information would be useful when selecting the most appropriate decontamination techniques for particular contamination scenarios.

## Highlights

- An electrokinetic remediation treatment of radioactive concrete is proposed
- The treatment combines a KCl wash to ion exchange  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  contamination
- Results show relationship between initial contamination and final removal efficiency
- Eliminates hazardous reagents usually needed for high decontamination efficiencies



1                    **Remediation of <sup>137</sup>Cs Contaminated Concrete Using Electrokinetic Phenomena and**  
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3                    **Ionic Salt Washes in Nuclear Energy Contexts.**  
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16                    *Abstract*  
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19                    This work describes the first known the use of electrokinetic treatments and ionic salt washes to  
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21                    remediate concrete contaminated with <sup>137</sup>Cs. A series of experiments were performed on concrete  
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43                    most appropriate decontamination techniques for particular contamination scenarios.  
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46                    *Keywords*  
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49                    137-Caesium; Electrokinetic Decontamination; Ionic Salt Washes; Concrete Remediation; Nuclear  
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51                    Decommissioning  
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54                    *1. Introduction*  
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57                    In the United Kingdom, the activities involved in the nuclear fuel cycle have generated a large national  
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59                    inventory of hazardous radioactive material, specifically at legacy facilities such as the Sellafield site,  
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including a large volume of contaminated buildings and surfaces [1]. Specifically, the UK Nuclear Decommissioning Authority estimates there to be >3,000,000m<sup>3</sup> of radioactively-contaminated concrete at sites it has responsibility for decommissioning [2]. Consequently, the decontamination and remediation of these sites, and subsequent disposal of contaminated material, is one of the largest engineering challenges facing the UK nuclear industry.

Due to limited space in waste repositories, the UK strategy for managing radioactive wastes has placed an emphasis on adopting the 'Waste Hierarchy' [3]. As such, increased focus has been on removing contamination from building materials prior to demolition with the aim of minimising the volumes of radioactive waste sent for disposal.

Most decontamination techniques adopted in the UK fall into two principal types, mechanical and chemical. Both are effective but have significant drawbacks in the secondary wastes they produce and the hazardous nature of the techniques [4–6]. Accordingly, there is an ongoing requirement to discover new treatments which combine the effectiveness of existing decontamination treatments with reduced operational hazard. One such technique is electrokinetic remediation: the use of an applied electric field to induce the migration of charged materials in a saturated porous medium [7]. The technique has been utilised for the treatment of land, soils, gravels contaminated with halogens [8], hydrocarbons [9,10], heavy metals [11–15], pesticides [16], and radionuclides [17–20], with ongoing studies to scale-up the technique [21]. However, research into its potential as a concrete decontamination technique has been limited.

## 2. *Electrokinetic Radioactive Concrete Remediation Techniques*

The application of electrokinetic concrete remediation can be divided into three categories based on the physical form of the concrete and its arrangement relative to the electrodes and electrolyte. The categories are: the *ex situ* treatment of crushed concrete, the *ex situ* treatment of intact monoliths; the remediation of intact concrete surfaces *in situ*.

### 2.1. *Ex Situ Crushed Materials*

Crushing concretes offers two advantages over *in situ* electrokinetic remediation of concrete monoliths: Firstly, crushing concrete increases the available surface area for decontamination which reduces the time taken to achieve acceptable levels of radionuclide extraction, especially for

radionuclides that have migrated deep into a concrete matrix. Secondly, using dedicated facilities provides for greater process control, allowing a wider range of reagents and washing techniques not permissible under on-site regulations. The major disadvantage is that demolishing contaminated buildings for transport to a facility can generate large amounts of radioactive particulate, creating a respiratory hazard [22].

Kim et al. studied the effects of electrokinetic treatment on crushed concrete (0.6-1.2mm particle size) washed with HCl prior to remediation [23]. Their results show that for unwashed concrete, a 15 day treatment removed ~60% of  $\text{Cs}^+$  and negligible levels of  $\text{Co}^{2+}$  (~0.9%). Washing the crushed concrete with  $3 \text{ mol dm}^{-3}$  HCl for 4 hours before the electrokinetic treatment increased removal efficiencies to a maximum of 99.7% for  $\text{Co}^{2+}$  and 99.6% for  $\text{Cs}^+$ . Additionally, a second work by Kim et al. studied pre-treatment washing with  $\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$ , which increased removal efficiencies to 99.6% for  $\text{Co}^{2+}$  and 99.3% for  $\text{Cs}^+$ . Additionally, crushed concretes (0.6-1.2mm particle size), containing  $^{60}\text{Co}$  and  $^{137}\text{Cs}$ , were also treated [24]. Entrained  $^{60}\text{Co}$  ( $420\text{Bq kg}^{-1}$ ), was removed by ~98.45% and  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  ( $560\text{Bq kg}^{-1}$ ) by ~87.18% [24]. The increase in removal efficiency, compared to the unwashed trials, was attributed to the acid wash lowering the concrete pH to ~3.7. The reduction in pH causes  $\text{CaCO}_3$  in the concrete to decompose to  $\text{CO}_2$ , allowing bound radionuclides to become available for transport. The lowering of concrete pH also prevents  $\text{Co}^{2+}$  from forming  $\text{Co}(\text{OH})_2$ , which occurs above pH 6, hence the rise in  $\text{Co}^{2+}$  removal efficiency between unwashed and washed concretes.

Similarly, Yurchenko et al. carried out electrokinetic decontamination of concrete rubble contaminated with uranium, with individual concrete pieces being  $\leq 3\text{kg}$  [25]. In total, 93kg of rubble was placed inside a migration cell similar to the one used by Kim et al. [25]. Their results show that an 800 hour electrokinetic treatment accelerated uranium removal by a factor of 70-140 compared to a static regime, with a maximum removal efficiency of 95%.

The results of both studies by Kim et al. and by Yurchenko et al. on the application of electrokinetic regimes on crushed concrete show that the dominant transport phenomenon occurring is electromigration, accounting for ~94% of total ion transport [23–25].

## 2.2. *Ex Situ Treatment of Monoliths*

The treatment of concrete monoliths is comparable to the remediation of crushed concretes, with the physical form of the concrete being the only difference. Monoliths require less processing prior to decontamination but the decrease in surface area compared to crushed concretes typically reduces the decontamination efficiency.

Popov et al. observed the 3-fold increase in  $\text{Cs}^+$  decontamination that 9-hour electrokinetic application had on  $\text{Cs}^+$  removal from the surface of a monolithic concrete sample compared to a static regime (23.2% no voltage, 61.5% electrokinetic) [26]. Their work also showed EDTA acted as a superior electrolyte for removing  $\text{Cs}^+$  compared to distilled water, (0.067mmol  $\text{l}^{-1}$  of  $\text{Cs}^+$  removed for EDTA and 0.048mmol  $\text{l}^{-1}$  for distilled water). A second study by Popov et al. described the decontamination of a  $128\text{cm}^3$  concrete monolith, reporting removal efficiencies of 30.8%  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  and 40.4%  $^{60}\text{Co}$ , respectfully, after 3600 minute application [27]. As reported in the studies above, 90% of  $\text{Cs}^+$  ions were transported toward the cathode via electromigration [27].

## 2.3. *In Situ Decontamination*

The electrokinetic decontamination of concrete surfaces is the most direct example of *in situ* concrete decontamination. The technique utilises comparatively large electrode setups ( $\sim 1.7\text{ m}^2$ ) to cover contaminated concrete surfaces. Counter electrodes are either placed into the concrete, through drilling, or structural concrete reinforcement bars are used.

DePaoli studied the electrokinetic transport of  $\text{Cs}^+$ ,  $\text{Sr}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Co}^{2+}$ , and  $\text{U}^{3+}$  through a 9.5mm concrete disk, mimicking the contamination and subsequent decontamination of concrete surfaces [28]. The authors found only  $\text{Cs}^+$  was readily removable (with over 95% of  $\text{Cs}^+$  transported through and removed from the concrete sample): 63% of  $\text{Co}^{2+}$  precipitated onto the exposed surface and 73% of the  $\text{Sr}^{2+}$  used was retained within the sample.

Castellote et al. demonstrated a range of *in situ* electrokinetic treatments for samples and surfaces artificially contaminated with  $\text{Cs}^+$ ,  $\text{Co}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Sr}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$  [29]. The first two experiments consisted of casting concrete cylinders and contaminating them through the addition of contaminants during mixing or contaminating the exposed cathode-facing surfaces. The application of varying electrokinetic treatments on these samples led to a reduction in  $\text{Cs}^+$  content in the samples by 25-

40% from experiments with  $\text{Cs}^+$  in the casting solution and 75-95% from  $\text{Cs}^+$  surface decontamination, with the higher removal efficiencies found in the samples with greater initial contamination.

A third experiment by Castellote et al. adopted a honeycomb electrode arrangement placed over the sample using tap water as the electrolyte [29]. The extraction of  $\text{Cs}^+$  from the four tested areas averaged ~83 %, and removed contaminants from a depth of 10mm. Further analysis of the slab showed that even  $\text{Cs}^+$  initially present on the lateral sections of the slab had been removed. Despite a shallow depth of contamination, no extraction was detected for  $\text{Co}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Sr}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$ .

Frizon et al. conducted an experimental study largely similar to one of those carried out by Castellote et al., specifically electrokinetically decontaminating a concrete cylinders contaminated with non-active  $\text{Cs}^+$  [30]. Their results are consistent with those of Castellote et al., that higher initial contaminations lead to higher removal efficiencies, specifically ~95% and ~81% for samples contaminated with 0.309 and  $3.84 \times 10^{-3} \text{ mmol cm}^{-3}$ , respectively.

The first example of *in situ* concrete decontamination on a field test was conducted by Lomasney et al. [31]. Their work focused on the removal of thorium from concrete at the US Department of Energy site using a bespoke Surface Electrokinetic Extraction Pad (SEEC). They recorded removal efficiencies ~82% for  $^{252}\text{Th}$  using nitric acid as the electrolyte. This work was built upon by Popov et al. further demonstrating surface decontamination using SEEC in the effective removal of  $^{252}\text{Th}$ ,  $^{235/238}\text{U}$ ,  $^{60}\text{Co}$ ,  $^{90}\text{Sr}$  and  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  from a  $1.8\text{m}^2$  surface using citric acid in the electrolyte [31]. Their results demonstrate 100% removal of uranium, thorium and cobalt after 500 minutes of application.  $\text{Sr}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Cs}^+$  were again slower to be removed as they possess a lower complexing forming ability, with the citric acid electrolyte.

*Table 1. Experimental removal efficiency, decontamination factor, and initial concentration for literature studies closely resembling the design of this study (above dashed line) and studies with different experimental geometry or electrolyte enhancement is used (below dashed line).*

Study	Contaminant	Thickness (mm)	Approximate Contamination ( $\text{mmol cm}^{-3}$ )	Removal Efficiency	DF
DePaoli et al. (1995)	$\text{Cs}^+$	9.5	$1.8 \times 10^{-3}$	95%	20
Castellote et al. (2002) 1	$\text{Cs}^+$	30	$1.4 \times 10^{-3}$	95%	20
Castellote et al. (2002) 2	$\text{Cs}^+$	75	$1.51 \times 10^{-7}$	40%	1.67
Frizon et al. (2005) 1	$\text{Cs}^+$	18	$3.84 \times 10^{-3}$	81%	5
Frizon et al. (2005) 2	$\text{Cs}^+$	18	0.309	95%	23

Castellote et al. (2002) 3	Cs <sup>+</sup>	-	$5.11 \times 10^{-3}$	90%	10
Popov et al. (2008) 1	Cs <sup>+</sup>	-	$3.45 \times 10^{-16}$	31%	1
Popov et al. (2008) 2	<sup>137</sup> Cs <sup>+</sup>	-	-	85%	7
Kim et al. (2009) 1	Cs <sup>+</sup>	-	$4.61 \times 10^{-3}$	55%	2.2
Kim et al. (2009) 2	Cs <sup>+</sup>	-	$4.63 \times 10^{-3}$	99.60%	250
Kim et al. (2010) 1	<sup>137</sup> Cs <sup>+</sup>	-	$1.16 \times 10^{-11}$	52%	2
Kim et al. (2010) 2	<sup>137</sup> Cs <sup>+</sup>	-	$1.16 \times 10^{-11}$	99.30%	143
Castellote et al. (2011)	Cs <sup>+</sup>	10	-	90%	10

#### 2.4. Removal Efficiency Enhancement

Electrokinetic remediation can only extract contaminants that are mobile, as demonstrated in the above studies where Cs<sup>+</sup> was the only contaminate extracted to a significant degree without the addition of any reagents, since Cs<sup>+</sup> is soluble over a wide range of pH. Other isotopes (<sup>60</sup>Co, <sup>90</sup>Sr, <sup>238</sup>U etc.) precipitate out in the high pH environments of concrete pore solutions inhibiting their removal. Additionally, the adsorptive properties of concrete further prohibit ionic migration, particularly for some of the radionuclides of interest [32,33]. Because of these factors, electrokinetic concrete decontamination has adopted a range of electrolyte manipulation and sample pre-treatment techniques. These techniques are designed to transform contamination into a form that is readily transportable. Dissolving the concrete and contaminants in strong acid (HCl, H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>), or forming complexants and chelates (EDTA, citric acid, nitric acid, acetic acid) have all been shown to be effective [24,27]. However, facilities used in the nuclear fuel cycle maintain strict regulations on the use of hazardous and toxic substances. This makes the use of EDTA and strong acids in electrokinetic field trials problematic. Of the reagents used, only citric acid meets conventional safety standards for use on nuclear sites.

#### 2.5. Reducing the Hazard

Most studies outlined above adopt hazardous reagents to enhance the removal efficiency of the electrokinetic technique. To increase the possibilities of operational deployment, enhancement techniques must be sort that maintain the effectiveness of the electrokinetic treatment but negate the chemical hazard. One possible approach outlined by Kaminski *et al.* are ionic washes, the use of inert ionic salts (e.g. NaCl, KCl, NH<sub>4</sub>) to ion exchange with contaminants [34]. Kaminski *et al.* note that although the ionic washes are effective at ion exchanging with contaminants, once exchanged, these contaminants can migrate deeper into a surface. By incorporating electrokinetic techniques with ionic

washes it could be possible to control the process of ion exchange and allow the contamination to be safely removed from the concrete or building materials.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to demonstrate the use of electrokinetic techniques in combination with ionic washes to remove  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  from concrete, establishing the effectiveness of electrokinetic treatments without the need to use hazardous chemicals. This would allow the treatment, which has been shown to be one of the most cost effective decontamination techniques [35], to be more widely adopted on nuclear licensed sites in the effort to decontaminate and dispose of the vast amount of radioactive contaminated concrete materials.

### 3. Materials and Method

#### 3.1. Concrete

The concrete samples used throughout this work were mixed with a 3:2:1 ratio (pebble aggregate, standard siliceous sand, and Ordinary Portland Cement respectively) based on European Standard EN 196-1, with a water to cement mass ration of 0: 5. The concrete was poured into cylindrical polypropylene moulds, 150 mm long with an inner diameter of 105 mm, and left to cure for 28 days. At the end of the curing period the cylinders were cut into smaller thickness sections (20, 25, 35, 65 mm).

Following this, concrete samples were artificially contaminated using baths of KCl or  $^{137}\text{Cs}$ , utilising cationic diffusion as the mechanism for contamination. To achieve equilibrium, samples were sealed in the contamination baths for 50 days and shaken periodically, concentrations of the contamination solutions are shown in Table 2. After this period the samples were rinsed in deionised water and dried at 50°C for seven days to remove moisture. The samples were then analysed radiometrically to discern the relative contamination, showing a maximum adsorbed contamination of 0.521 and 3.551 x 10<sup>-9</sup> mmol cm<sup>-3</sup> for K<sup>+</sup> and  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  respectively; all details of the initial activities and adsorbed masses of contamination are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Composition of the contamination baths and the initial mass of contamination adsorbed onto the concrete samples, for both the K<sup>+</sup> and  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  samples (all  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  samples were 25 mm thick).

Sample No.	Contaminate	Thickness (mm)	Concentration of Bath (mmol cm <sup>-3</sup> )	Activity Sorbed (kBq)	Mass Sorbed (mmol cm <sup>-3</sup> )
1	K <sup>+</sup>	20	3	0.121 (±0.009)	0.521

2		20	3	0.105 ( $\pm 0.007$ )	0.454
3		35	3	0.206 ( $\pm 0.014$ )	0.508
4		65	3	0.157 ( $\pm 0.010$ )	0.208
-----					
		Activity of Bath (kBq ml <sup>-1</sup> )			
5		25	0.889	328.25 ( $\pm 0.56$ )	$3.551 \times 10^{-9}$
6	<sup>137</sup> Cs <sup>+</sup>	25	0.604	268.61 ( $\pm 0.40$ )	$2.906 \times 10^{-9}$
7		25	0.089	39.68 ( $\pm 0.08$ )	$4.293 \times 10^{-10}$
8		25	0.042	22.61 ( $\pm 0.05$ )	$2.446 \times 10^{-10}$

### 3.2. Experimental Phantom and Detector

The electrokinetic experiments were carried out using a radioanalytical phantom, [Figure 1](#). The experimental setup was similar to the one described in previous works [36,37], as such only a concise description is given here. Concrete samples were sealed into a polypropylene pipe connecting two electrolyte compartments: each of volume 1.04 litres. The external DC necessary for the generation of electrokinetic transport was provided by an EL302T power supply (Thrulby Thandar Instruments), set to an applied voltage of 60V. The power supply was connected to a mild-steel reinforcement bar cathode, and a platinised titanium mesh anode. The anode and cathode were mounted 50mm from the surface of the concrete samples within the respective compartments. Two additional platinum electrodes were placed at the anodic and cathodic-facing surfaces of the samples to measure the potential difference across their length. To prevent electrolyte heating, and unwanted electroosmotic flow, the current was limited to 35mA. The electrolyte contained a 100mol m<sup>-3</sup> NaOH solution to match the alkaline cementitious pore solutions and the conditions found in nuclear fuel storage ponds.



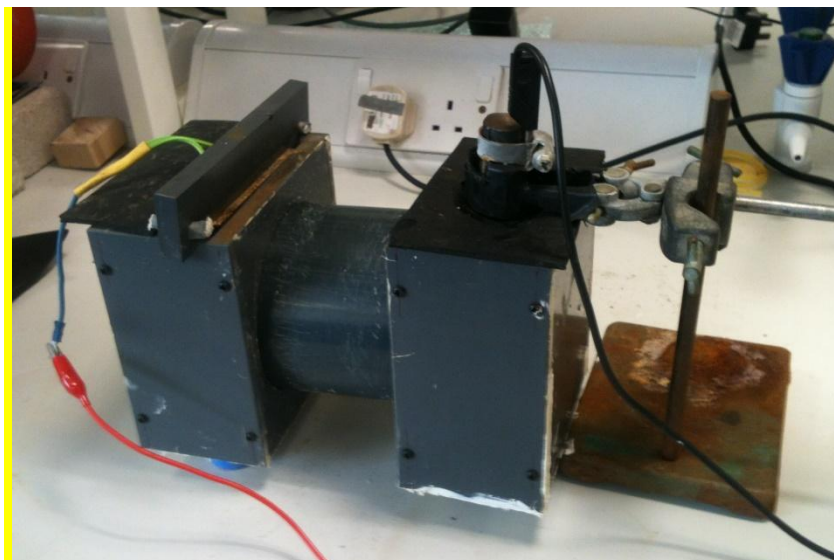


Figure 1. Radioanalytical phantom used in this work, the anode compartment (left) contains platinised titanium mesh, the cathode compartment (right) contains mild steel cathode.

The decontamination of concrete samples was assessed radiometrically:  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  decontamination using a CsI(Tl) scintillator;  $\text{K}^+$  contaminated samples using a bespoke NaI(Tl) well-type scintillation counter [38]. The radioactivity of the samples contaminated with  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  allowed for *in situ* counting of the catholyte compartment, see Figure 2. Where  $^{40}\text{K}$  was the isotopic tracer 40ml aliquots of the anolyte and catholyte solutions were removed from the phantom and counted for 4 hours before being replaced in their respective electrode compartment. Similarly, the activity of each concrete sample was measured before and after decontamination.



Figure 2. Photograph of the *in situ* CsI(Tl) detector setup used to monitor the decontamination of  $^{137}\text{Cs}$ , where the detector is surrounded with a lead collimator sheath with the circular aperture cut into the centre.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The experimental decontamination protocol used was the same for both the samples contaminated with  $K^+$  and  $^{137}Cs^+$  respectfully (with the exception of using an ionic wash for two of the  $^{137}Cs$  samples). The protocol was run until a substantial decrease in the rate of contamination entering the catholyte was observed. Following this the samples were removed, washed, oven dried, and analysed radiometrically as before.

### 4.1. Potassium Decontamination

It can be seen from Figure 3 that the majority of  $K^+$  was removed within the first 300 hours, after which the count increases until reaching a plateau after approximately 700 hours of treatment for Sample 2. At the conclusion of the experiment the  $K^+$  concentration in the cathode compartment was  $74 \text{ mol m}^{-3}$ , corresponding to 2.9g or  $95.5 \pm 5\%$  of the initial potassium contamination removed from Sample 2.

Similar catholyte count profiles were observed for the 35 and 65mm samples when exposed to the electrokinetic treatment, recording removal efficiencies of  $70.1 \pm 3\%$  and  $90.1 \pm 6\%$  respectively. This trend is consistent with the results for the  $^{137}Cs$  decontamination, see Figure 4, and the results of Castellote *et al.* (2002) who observed a potential trend where the most of the contamination is released in the early stages of the treatment [29]. Also consistent with Castellote *et al.* (2002), negligible amounts of  $K^+$  were detected in the anolyte, evidence that the primary transport mechanism during the experiment was electromigration.

Also shown in Figure 3, is the fraction of  $K^+$  contamination remaining at the conclusion of the treatment. In all samples where the electric field was applied there was a pronounced decrease in the  $K^+$  content remaining in the samples at the conclusion of the experiments. In contrast, no decrease was detected in Sample 1 which did not undergo electrokinetic treatment. These results show that the application of the electric field significantly promotes the transport of ions from the samples.

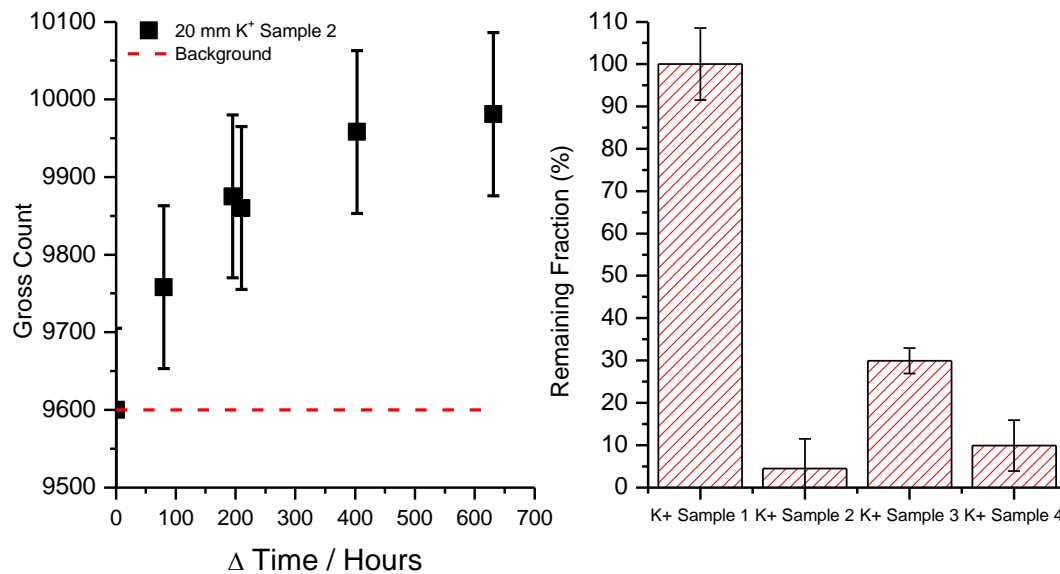


Figure 3. Variation with time in  $K^+$  concentration (as indicated by the gross radioactive count) in the catholyte solution as a result of the application of an external electric field (60V, 35mA) over concrete sample 2 (left). Fraction of  $K^+$  remaining in Samples 1-4 at the conclusion of decontamination treatment (right). Error bars indicate 3  $\sigma$ .

#### 4.2. Caesium Decontamination

As in the potassium decontamination experiments, once the electric field is applied a rapid change in contamination removal was observed. During this change the count rate detected in the catholyte followed a near exponential increase with time, reaching a near-linear increase after ~130 hours. The observed increase in catholytic gross count with time is consistent between the two samples studied, Sample 5 and 7, as shown in Figure 4. Though it can be seen that for both samples the catholyte count had not reach a plateau, indicating  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  was still being removed when the experiments were terminated, the post-treatment assessment shows that only ~20% was removed from each sample. This is significantly lower than the removal efficiency recorded for the  $K^+$ , where the removal efficiency ranged from 70-95.5%

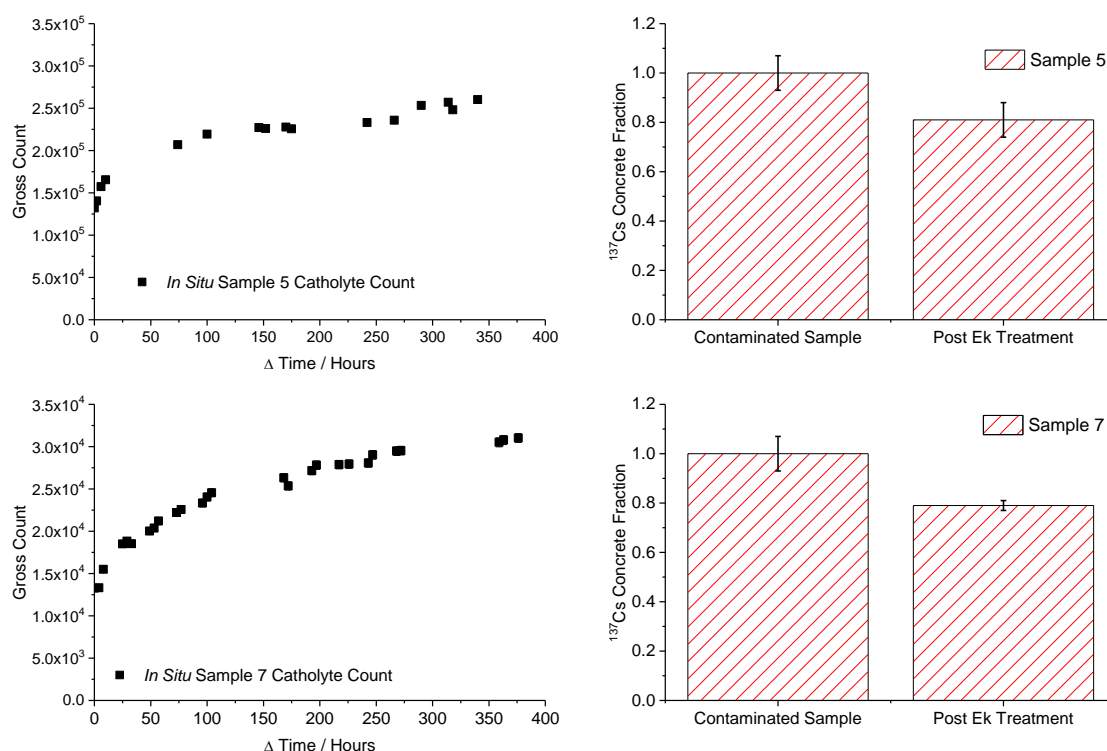


Figure 4. Variation with time in  $^{137}\text{Cs}^+$  catholyte gross count during application of an external electric field (60V, 35mA) over concrete Samples 5 and 7, 328 and 40kBq respectively (left). Fraction of  $^{137}\text{Cs}^+$  remaining in Samples 5 and 7 after 360 hours of decontamination treatment (right). Errors bars indicate  $3\sigma$ .

Adopting the ionic salt wash to the electrokinetic treatment of  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  contaminated concrete (Samples 6 and 8), shows a difference compared to that of the non-wash  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  samples (Samples 5 and 7). As can be seen in Figure 5, for both experiments the addition of KCl to the anolyte solution (400 and 135mol  $\text{m}^{-3}$  for Samples 6 and 8 respectively) produced a upsurge in the  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  removed from the concrete, where the red vertical line corresponds to the point at which the KCl was added. Prior to the KCl addition it can be seen in both experiments that the rate of Cs is relatively modest and broadly similar to the extraction rates seen in Sample 5 and 7. Following introduction, the rate of removal dramatically increases then slows, plateauing after  $\sim 450$  hours of treatment in both Sample 6 and 8. There is an argument to say that the rate of  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  removal decreased because the majority of the  $\text{K}^+$  ionic wash had been used, however a significant proportion of  $\text{K}^+$  was still detected in the anolyte. As can also be seen from Figure 5, the effect on the final removal efficiencies was as significant, increasing to 40 and 60% respectively for the two samples.

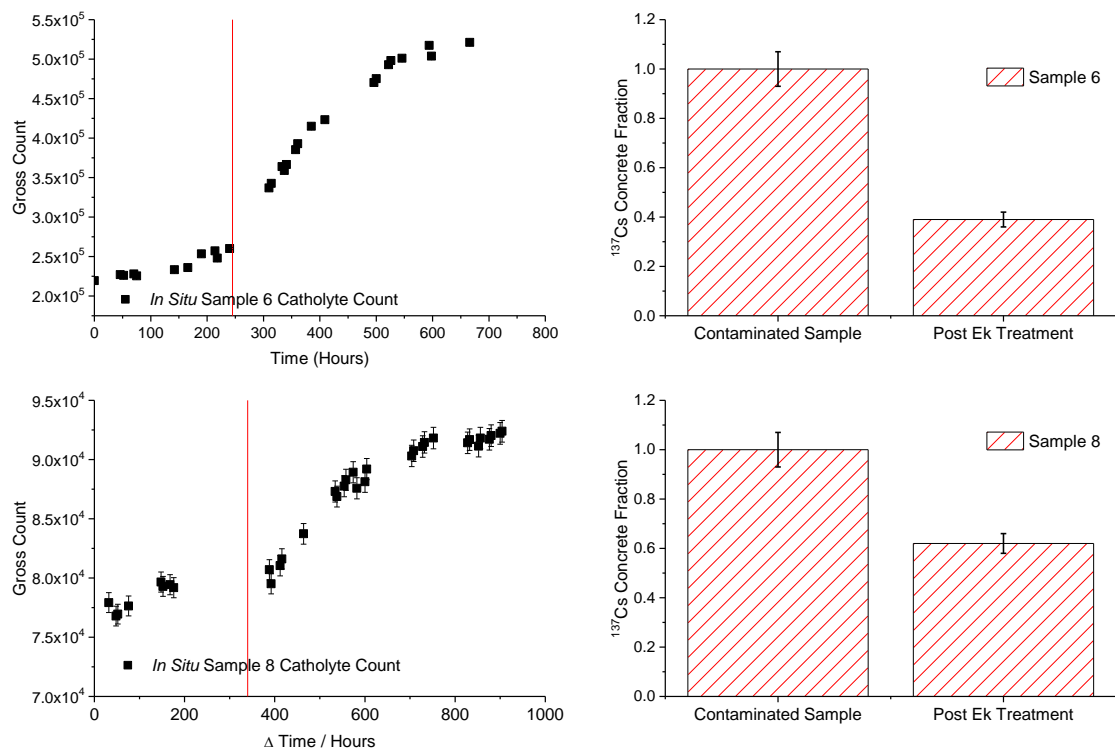


Figure 5. (Left) Change in the in situ catholyte gross count over time, (Right) change in activity of  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  Samples 6 and 8 (269 and 23kBq respectively) after 900 hours of electrokinetic treatment. The vertical red line indicates the point of KCl addition, 400 and 135  $\text{mol m}^{-3}$  for Samples 6 and 8 respectively. Errors bars indicate  $3\sigma$ .

Table 3. Complete results from the electrokinetic decontamination of concrete samples contaminated with  $\text{K}^+$  and  $^{137}\text{Cs}^+$  carried out in this study.

Sample No.	Contaminant	Thickness (mm)	Initial Contamination ( $\text{mmol cm}^{-3}$ )	Removal Efficiency	DF	Ionic Wash ( $\text{mol m}^{-3}$ )
1	$\text{K}^+$	20	0.521	$0.8 \pm 5\%$	1	-
2		20	0.454	$95 \pm 7\%$	22.22	-
3		35	0.508	$70 \pm 3\%$	3.44	-
4		65	0.208	$90 \pm 6\%$	10.12	-
5	$^{137}\text{Cs}^+$	25	$3.551 \times 10^{-9}$	$19 \pm 0.13\%$	1.24	-
6		25	$2.906 \times 10^{-9}$	$*60 \pm 0.13\%$	2.5	400
7		25	$4.293 \times 10^{-10}$	$20 \pm 0.47\%$	1.26	-
8		25	$2.446 \times 10^{-10}$	$*37 \pm 0.59\%$	1.58	135

The results from the potassium and caesium decontamination are shown in Table 3, along with the initial level of contamination. The most striking observation from these results is the difference in

removal efficiency between the potassium contaminated samples and those with  $^{137}\text{Cs}$ , with a mean removal efficiency approximately 50% higher for potassium over caesium. Given that the methods employed to contaminate and decontaminate were similar, the reason for this disparity is not immediately apparent.

An explanation is that the significant difference between the contamination levels, and therefore number of ions, present in the samples affect the removal efficiency. This conclusion has previously been alluded to in other studies after similar findings of higher ionic loading and higher removal efficiency were observed to concrete samples contaminated with two different masses [29,30]. Based on the activity, the  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  was in the range of  $0.53\text{--}7.68 \times 10^{-10}$  moles, compared to between 0.08 and 0.15 moles of potassium. The large difference in the ion loading between the two sample batches may have a significant effect on the decontamination efficiency observed in the experiment due to the interaction between the contaminating ions and the concrete matrix.

A variation in removal efficiency with loading would be expected from materials that present a range of adsorption sites within the concrete matrix with differing adsorption strengths. At low ionic loading the strongly adsorbing sites would be occupied preferentially, making removal difficult, and at high ionic loading both strong and weaker adsorbing sites will be occupied, resulting in a higher removal efficiencies. Sites of differing adsorption strength would be expected of chemically composite or inhomogeneous materials, such as concrete or cement [32,33]. In this instance, therefore, the tiny volume of  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  in the samples is likely adsorbed onto strongly adsorbing sites on the aluminosilicate mineral structure of the concrete.

The capacity of concrete to retain cations varies depending on a range of physicochemical and compositional factors. In this instance, it is likely that the adsorption capacity of the concrete samples is greater than the mass of  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  used to contaminate the samples based on a conservative adsorption capacity estimate of  $1 \times 10^{-4} \text{ mol kg}^{-1}$  [32,33]. Conversely, there is a significantly larger mass of  $\text{K}^+$  in the potassium samples,  $\sim 0.1$  mole, than there is likely the capacity of adsorption sites. As a result,  $\text{K}^+$  will saturate the adsorption sites leaving the vast majority of  $\text{K}^+$  in the pore solution.

When the concrete samples are removed, washed, and dried at the conclusion of the contamination phase a fraction of the  $\text{K}^+$  in the pore solution will precipitate as the pore water evaporates. Hence, when the sample is placed back in the radiological phantom for decontamination with DDW the

precipitated  $K^+$  re-dissolves in the new pore solution. The  $K^+$  in the pore volume is therefore available for electrokinetic transport on application of the external electric field and easily removed. In contrast, the concentration of caesium in the experiments was far lower than that of potassium, consequently the lower mass of  $Cs^+$  is likely adsorbed onto the concrete matrix, occupying the strongly adsorbing sites first. Strongly adsorbed  $Cs^+$  will be more resistant to electrokinetic removal from the matrix, as appears to be the case, in addition to the cementitious material having a greater affinity for  $Cs^+$  over  $K^+$ .

This hypothesis is reinforced by the results from the  $Cs^+$  decontamination studies incorporating the ionic salt wash. The ionic salt provides ions to displace the adsorbed  $Cs^+$  via uni-univalent ion exchange, shown in Eq. 1. [39], which then electromigrate out of the concrete into the catholyte. Hence, the observed increased rate of  $Cs^+$  entering the catholyte in Figure 5 and the final decontamination efficiencies for these two trials, Table 3.



The lower removal efficiency for Sample 8 compared to Sample 6 is further evidence of the loading effects. The two samples had an order of magnitude difference in initial contamination, given these loading effects, one may expect a lower mean removal efficiency for samples of lower contamination as the strongly adsorbing sites are the most difficult to access, even with highly concentrated ionic washes.

#### 4.3. Comparison with Other Studies

It is clear from Most studies outlined above adopt hazardous reagents to enhance the removal efficiency of the electrokinetic technique. To increase the possibilities of operational deployment, enhancement techniques must be sort that maintain the effectiveness of the electrokinetic treatment but negate the chemical hazard. One possible approach outlined by Kaminski *et al.* are ionic washes, the use of inert ionic salts (e.g. NaCl, KCl,  $NH_4$ ) to ion exchange with contaminates [34]. Kaminski *et al.* note that although the ionic washes are effective at ion exchanging with contaminates, once exchanged, these contaminates can migrate deeper into a surface. By incorporating electrokinetic

techniques with ionic washes it could be possible to control the process of ion exchange and allow the contamination to be safely removed from the concrete or building materials.

that a range of removal efficiencies have been recorded that are broadly consistent with the results in this study, however full comparison is difficult for the reasons described in Section 2.5. Castellote et al. (2002) refer to this issue and proposed evaluating decontamination efficiencies against the amount of charged passed when electromigration is the dominant transport mechanism [29]. Even this approach is flawed as the inclusion of NaOH to manage electrolyte pH is common, as well as the presence of competing ions in the concrete and electrolytes all provide additional charge carriers which could distort the comparison. One base-line for comparison is the amount of contamination present in the samples prior to treatment.

With the exception of the studies by Kim et al., which studied crushed concrete, the other examples identified in Section 2 broadly follow the pattern outlined above: higher initial contamination leads to higher removal efficiencies, as seen in Figure 6. The studies largely fit into two distinct groups, with a cluster of highly contaminated samples ( $> 1 \times 10^{-3} \text{mmol cm}^{-3}$ ) and a grouping of lower contamination ( $<1 \times 10^{-6} \text{mmol cm}^{-3}$ ). The separation of groups supports the hypothesis that a low-level of contamination is bound to the strongly adsorbing sites which fill rapidly at higher concentrations, leaving the majority of contamination precipitated into the concrete pore volume when dried. This relationship is evident between the  $\text{K}^+$  and  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  contaminated samples in this work and further supports the connection between the degree of contamination within a concrete and the adsorptive capacity of that concrete. This implies a threshold above which the contamination can be readily removed by electrokinetic treatment without the aid of salt washes or other enhancement techniques.



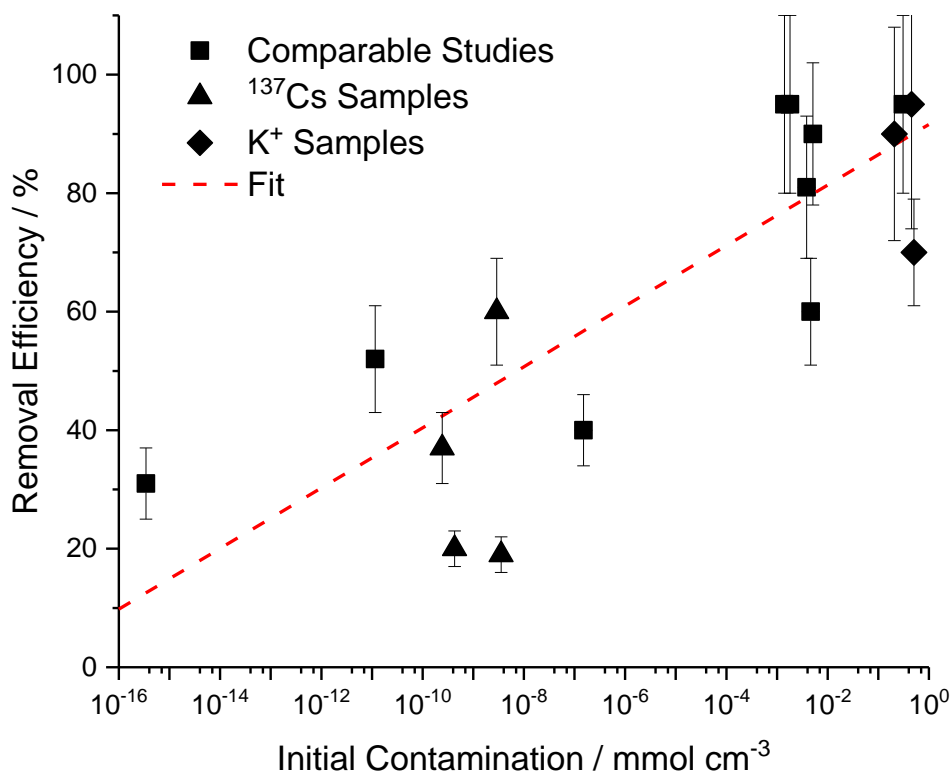


Figure 6. The relationship between the initial contamination in a concrete sample and the final removal efficiency recorded following electrokinetic decontamination, for studies broadly similar in design to the experiments carried out in this work, the red-dashed line is  $y = 0.0215\ln(x) + 0.903$ ,  $R^2 = 0.62$ .

This is an important result in the context of the existing literature and for the application of electrokinetics as an *in situ* decontamination. The chemicals used in the majority of literature studies for increasing electrokinetic decontamination efficiency are hazardous and their use is restricted on nuclear sites, particularly in high-dose environments. The observed effectiveness of ionic salt washing to replicate similar decontamination factors achieved with common enhancement agents provides a considerable benefit. The quantity of ionic salt need to decontaminate a large concrete sample would not pose the same safety complications as similar volumes of EDTA or HCl. This result offers a solution to one of the main obstacles to electrokinetic treatment becoming a viable concrete decontamination tool in the nuclear industry. However, with respect to hazards, Cl<sup>-</sup> itself is a common corrosion risk in the construction industry and the mitigation of the effects are widely studied.

## 5. Conclusion

The removal of  $K^+$  and  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  from concrete samples was conducted adopting an electrokinetic treatment, using an applied voltage of 60V and current limit of 35mA. The levels of initial contamination ranged from 0.208-0.521mmol  $\text{cm}^{-3}$  for  $K^+$  contaminated samples to 0.25-3.55  $\times 10^{-10}$ mmol  $\text{cm}^{-3}$  for  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  contaminated samples. The results show that the decontamination efficiency was between 75-95% for  $K^+$  and 19-21% for  $^{137}\text{Cs}$ . When a 396mol  $\text{m}^{-3}$  ionic salt wash of KCl was used alongside the electrokinetic treatment the decontamination efficiency of  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  increased threefold up to 60%, consistent with literature decontamination efficiencies for similar experimental design, shown in Table 1. We believe this is the first known description of experiments combining electrokinetic techniques and ionic salt washes to remediate radioactive concrete.

The results of this work highlights the relationship between the initial level of contamination and the achievable removal efficiencies, where at lower levels of contamination the contaminate ions are bound to strongly adsorbing sites within the concrete. In the case of this work it requires the addition of a high concentration ionic salt wash to ion exchange with a proportion of these ions, hence the increased removal efficiency of the ionic salt wash over just the electrokinetic treatment alone.

Because the decontamination efficiencies have been achieved without the use of hazardous chemicals the technique could be more easily adopted on nuclear sites, particularly in high-dose environments, where the use of powerful chemicals is restricted. Further work is being carried out to refine the treatments and develop a practical technology.

## Acknowledgements

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Caesium-137 is ubiquitous in the field of nuclear decommissioning, and arguably the most hazardous contaminant. Various techniques exist to remediate cementitious  $^{137}\text{Cs}$ -contaminated material, but these present additional waste management challenges. Extending its use from land and soil remediation of  $^{137}\text{Cs}$ , several studies have highlighted the potential of electrokinetic decontamination in the clean-up of radioactive concrete. The present study extends this knowledge to incorporate ionic salt washes that enhance the treatment efficiency making the technique fundamentally safer. The study also demonstrates a potential link between the mass of contamination and the effectiveness of electrokinetic remediation.

Table 1

Table 1. Experimental removal efficiency, decontamination factor, and initial concentration for literature studies closely resembling the design of this study (above dashed line) and studies with different experimental geometry or electrolyte enhancement is used (below dashed line).

Study	Contaminant	Thickness (mm)	Approximate Contamination (mmol cm <sup>-3</sup> )	Removal Efficiency	DF
DePaoli et al. (1995)	Cs <sup>+</sup>	9.5	1.8 × 10 <sup>-3</sup>	95%	20
Castellote et al. (2002) 1	Cs <sup>+</sup>	30	1.4 × 10 <sup>-3</sup>	95%	20
Castellote et al. (2002) 2	Cs <sup>+</sup>	75	1.51 × 10 <sup>-7</sup>	40%	1.67
Frizon et al. (2005) 1	Cs <sup>+</sup>	18	3.84 × 10 <sup>-3</sup>	81%	5
Frizon et al. (2005) 2	Cs <sup>+</sup>	18	0.309	95%	23
Castellote et al. (2002) 3	Cs <sup>+</sup>	-	5.11 × 10 <sup>-3</sup>	90%	10
Popov et al. (2008) 1	Cs <sup>+</sup>	-	3.45 × 10 <sup>-16</sup>	31%	1
Popov et al. (2008) 2	<sup>137</sup> Cs <sup>+</sup>	-	-	85%	7
Kim et al. (2009) 1	Cs <sup>+</sup>	-	4.61 × 10 <sup>-3</sup>	55%	2.2
Kim et al. (2009) 2	Cs <sup>+</sup>	-	4.63 × 10 <sup>-3</sup>	99.60%	250
Kim et al. (2010) 1	<sup>137</sup> Cs <sup>+</sup>	-	1.16 × 10 <sup>-11</sup>	52%	2
Kim et al. (2010) 2	<sup>137</sup> Cs <sup>+</sup>	-	1.16 × 10 <sup>-11</sup>	99.30%	143
Castellote et al. (2011)	Cs <sup>+</sup>	10	-	90%	10

Table 2

Sample No.	Contaminate	Thickness (mm)	Concentration of Bath (mmol cm <sup>-3</sup> )	Activity Sorbed (kBq)	Mass Sorbed (mmol cm <sup>-3</sup> )
1	K <sup>+</sup>	20	3	0.121 (±0.009)	0.521
2		20	3	0.105 (±0.007)	0.454
3		35	3	0.206 (±0.014)	0.508
4		65	3	0.157 (±0.010)	0.208
-----					
Activity of Bath (kBq ml <sup>-1</sup> )					
-----					
5	<sup>137</sup> Cs <sup>+</sup>	25	0.889	328.25 (±0.56)	3.551 × 10 <sup>-9</sup>
6		25	0.604	268.61 (±0.40)	2.906 × 10 <sup>-9</sup>
7		25	0.089	39.68 (±0.08)	4.293 × 10 <sup>-10</sup>
8		25	0.042	22.61 (±0.05)	2.446× 10 <sup>-10</sup>

Table 1. Composition of the contamination baths and the mass of contamination adsorbed onto the concrete samples, for both the K<sup>+</sup> and <sup>137</sup>Cs samples (all <sup>137</sup>Cs samples were 25 mm thick).

Table 3

Table 1. Complete results from the electrokinetic decontamination of concrete samples contaminated with  $K^+$  and  $^{137}Cs^+$  carried out in this study.

Sample No.	Contaminant	Thickness (mm)	Contamination (mmol cm <sup>-3</sup> )	Removal Efficiency	DF	Ionic Wash (mol m <sup>-3</sup> )
1	$K^+$	20	0.521	0.8 ± 5%	1	-
2		20	0.454	95 ± 7%	22.22	-
3		35	0.508	70 ± 3%	3.44	-
4		65	0.208	90 ± 6%	10.12	-
5	$^{137}Cs^+$	25	3.551 × 10 <sup>-9</sup>	19 ± 0.13%	1.24	-
6		25	2.906 × 10 <sup>-9</sup>	*60± 0.13%	2.5	400
7		25	4.293 × 10 <sup>-10</sup>	20 ± 0.47%	1.26	-
8		25	2.446× 10 <sup>-10</sup>	*37 ± 0.59%	1.58	135



A photograph of a custom-built experimental setup for measuring the magnetic field of a solenoid. The setup includes a large black solenoid with a central rod, a power supply unit, and various connecting wires and clamps. The solenoid is mounted on a wooden base, and the power supply is connected to it via red and black wires. A central rod is held in place by a clamp and a wooden block. The entire setup is placed on a white surface.

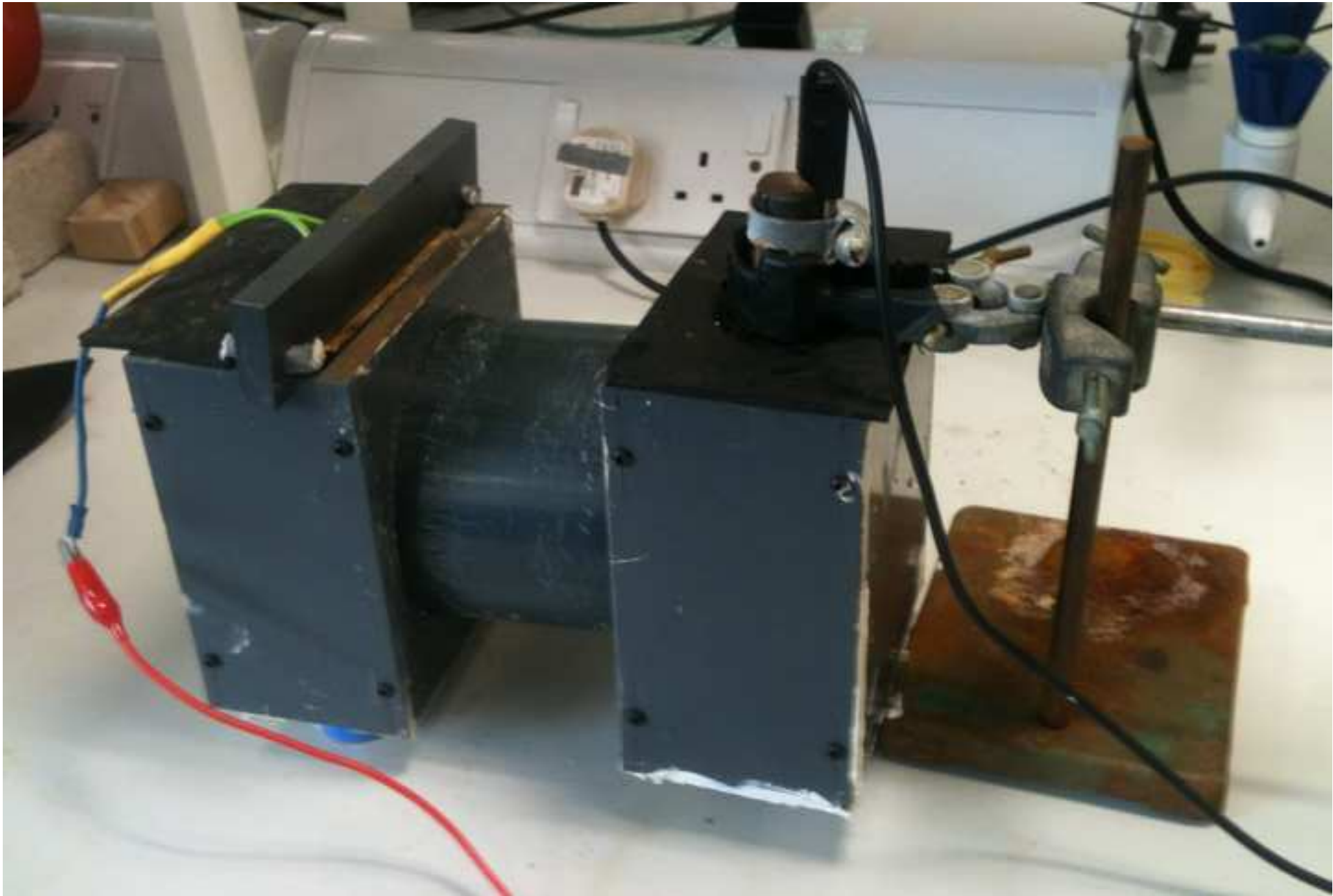
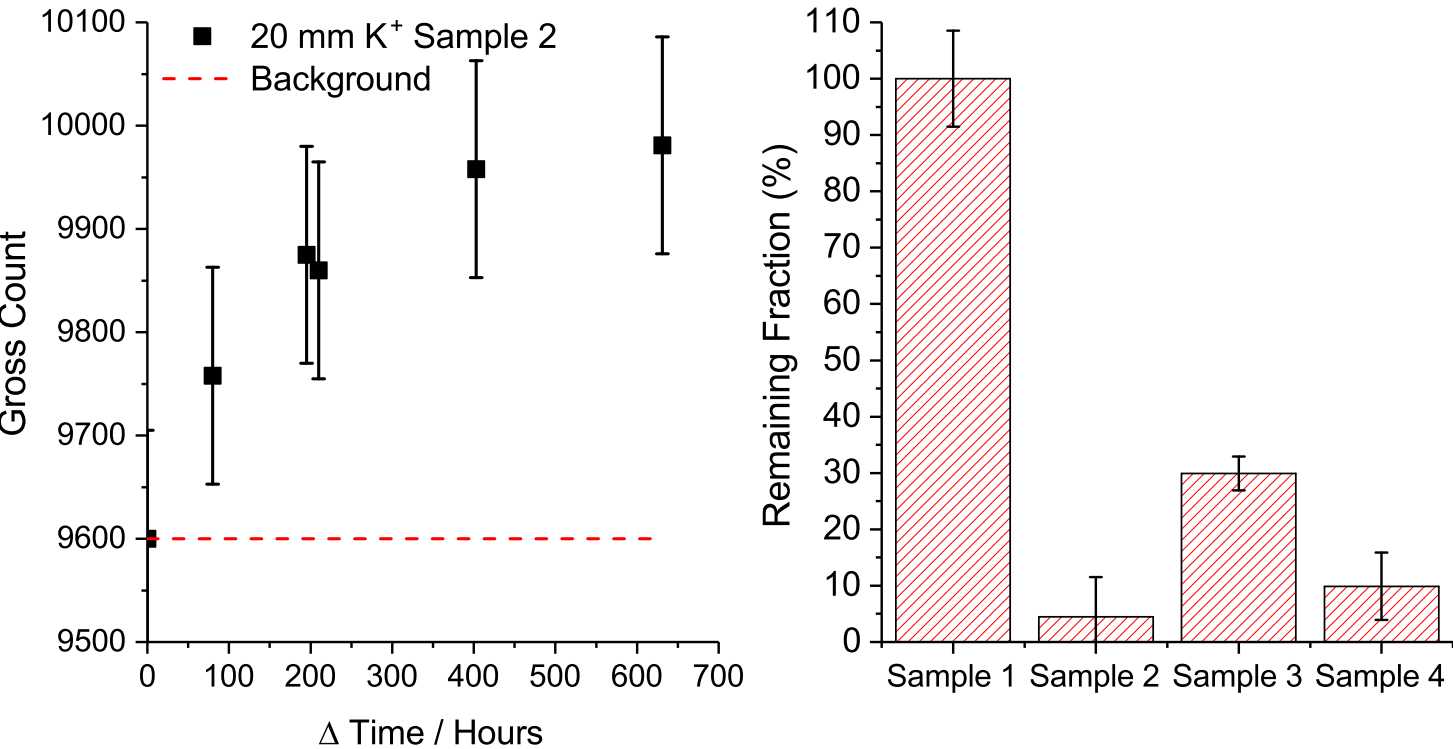


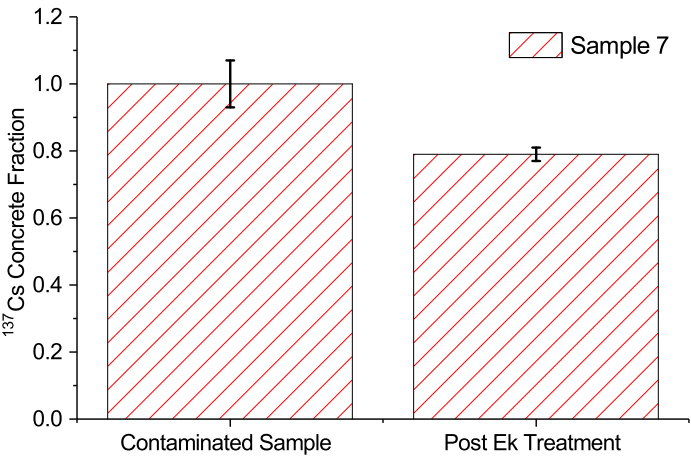
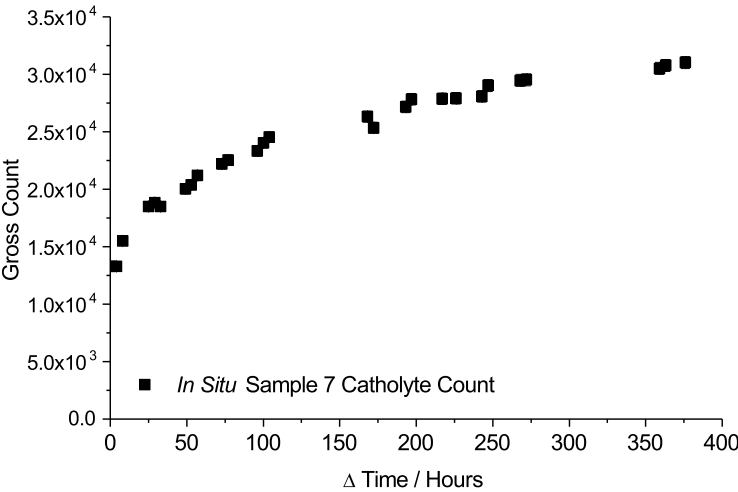
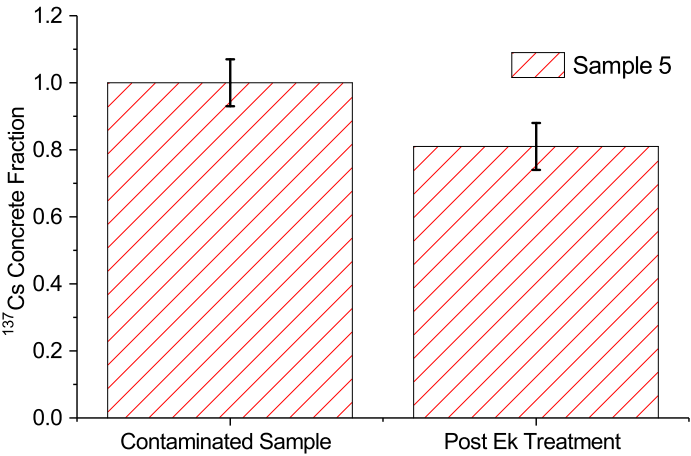
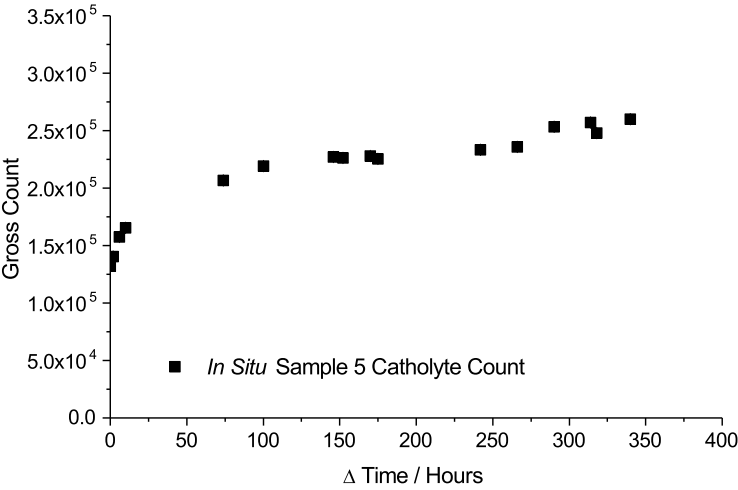
Figure 2  
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Figure 3  
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**Figure 4**  
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**Figure 5**  
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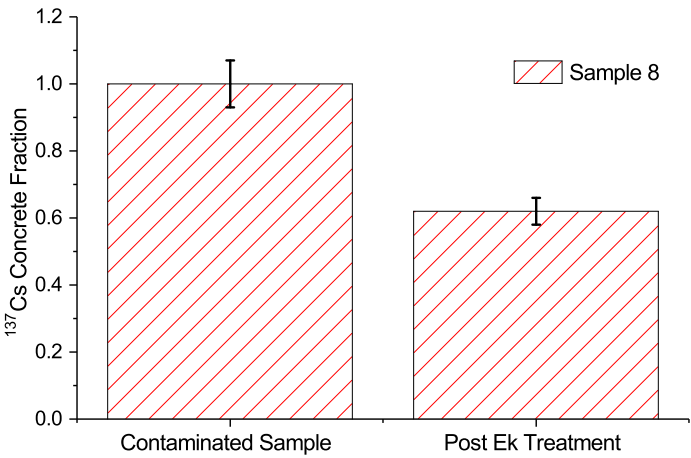
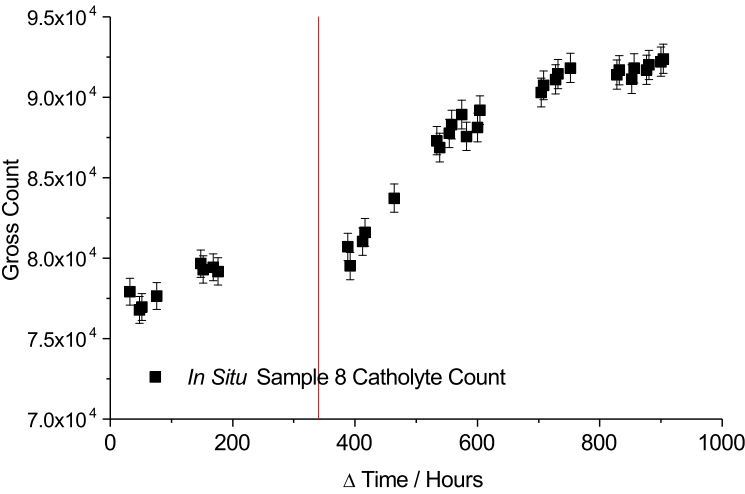
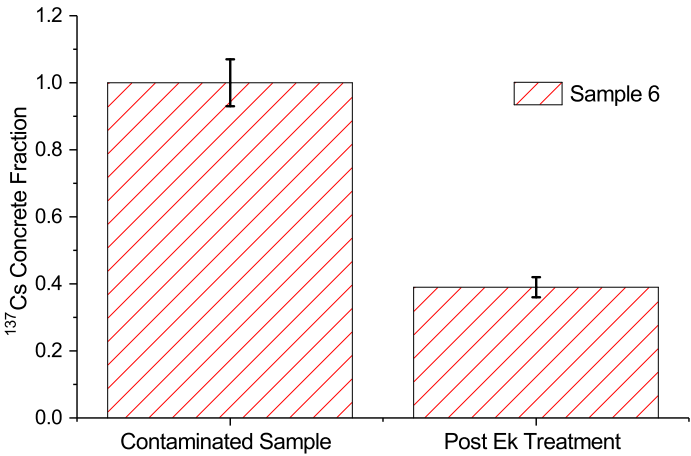
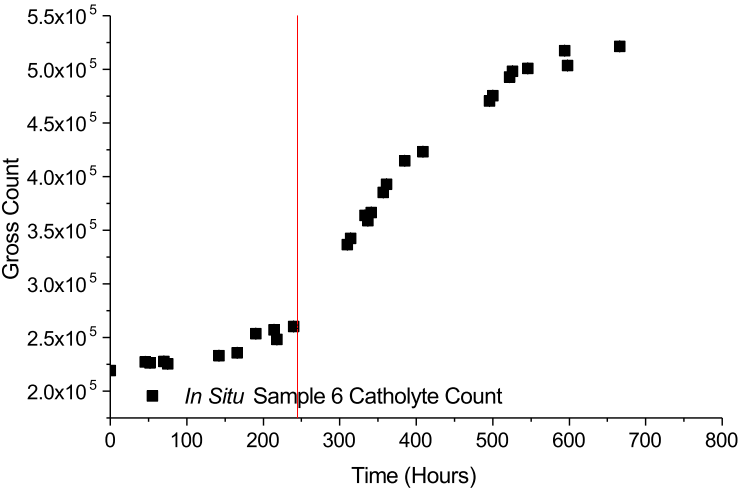


Figure 6  
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